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FROM THE THOUGHT OF POWER TO THE UNPOWER OF THOUGHT

PHILOFICTION MINORITIES, NON-LARUELLE, NON-PHILOSOPHY, POWER

From the Thought of Power to the Unpower of Thought

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From *Au-delà du principe de pouvoir* (Paris: Payot, 1978), p.13-21

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1) Multiplying the suspicions concerning the ends of thought, we begin by suspecting that

thought is perhaps endless, that all its power is deployed from something that we must call its “unpower” and distinguish it from powerlessness. From where do we know, from what criterion, and by what very modern brazenness do we decide that thought’s goal is, for example, to dominate its object, nature in the past and now man? And from what do we just know that thought has an object? Is it because the thinkers say that it has one and that it should dominate it? For us, whose load is not to add new goals to culture, nor even to refuse what we believe to be its past ends, for us who rather want to break with these somewhat boorish tragic gestures and attempt to make a divine and benevolent use of the “Revolution,” thought exists only as better when it is deprived of goals. It is towards the relations of power and thought, *arranged* otherwise than the moderns’ own, that we constrain our political affections, towards the refusal of the customary histrionics by which we have always, now more than ever, solved these problems of power. We also have our great disgust: in the past for activism and militancy, for political programmes that characterize a time that is perhaps complete, and now for the unsubtle [*sans nuances*] pathetic and anti-political that characterize a time that perhaps is beginning. The lack of dignity that defines the style of political thought since the 19th century, the hysterical approach poorly sobered of its problems – or, in other approaches, the incapacity to resist the suffering of power otherwise than by screaming and kneeling, by the absence of thought or hinter-thoughts, this configuration comes to take on a new modern form, full of spinelessness and powerlessness, that could very well characterize the conjuncture that makes us suffer, and that the previous excesses of a Marxism to do everything have bequeathed us like a supplementary obstacle.

Our problem is different: how do we carry out a positive critique of power, one that would finally be without an activist competition for power nor does it imply its massive and nihilist rejection; how do we carry out a critique that is in some way minor and, why not we guess: minoritarian, all the more implacable, and the least tempered, that it is minor?

This question ties the thought of power in the unpower of thinking, and this knot makes the minoritarian slogan as barely dogmatic as possible, formulated as: *the critique of powers must follow their production, i.e., from their meaning*. Determining the meaning of power, such is the condition of its critique: we, and the Moderns above all, have always done the inverse.

Now to enter with nothing more into the Thing, here are some lines of demarcations. They determined on one of their sides what we will call the Power Principle and, on the other side, the Beyond of this principle; the arrangement of the two slopes each time constitute one *thesis*:

Thesis 1: There is a “political” meaning or being of power: this is a definition that is so little tautological that it implies an affirmative division or dissidence (*Spaltung*) of power in which it is impossible to speak in general of because it is fractional in its essence. This division is both the effect and the condition of a minoritarian enunciation of power: an enunciation, i.e., a production of power; minoritarian, i.e., fractional; and fractional, i.e., whose affirmative continuous division would be the internal or genetic definition, the very being of power.

Thesis 2: Every political philosophy, that is, every philosophy to this day and above all modern philosophy (Marxism and anti-Marxism included), has always assumed known the political

meaning or being of power without really posing the question of its provenance, genealogy, or production, without being able to make its radical historicity an internal problem (the problem of its affirmative division).

Thesis 3: Every political philosophy, that is, every philosophy to this day and above all modern philosophy (Marxism and anti-Marxism included), has always confounded the political meaning of power with conceptual significations, imaginary representations, or real empirical relations of power. It made meaning an object in general, a theme, a form, a signification, a signifier – but never a “machine,” i.e., a fractional dispositive capable of simultaneously producing power and its productive essence and the relation of the two, that is, the “political” meaning of power. It defined power from existing forms of domination instead of doing the inverse as is necessary. It confounded the essence of power with its transcendent or dominant forms. Said otherwise, it reduced *the enunciation of power* to *political statements*. This confusion defines any philosophy, any politics, and political philosophy to this day as *onto-theo-political*.

Thesis 4: Every political philosophy, that is, every philosophy to this day and above all modern philosophy (Marxism and anti-Marxism included), if it always is given “Power” [« *le pouvoir* »] it is given it under a mediated form across non-political intermediaries. It subordinated power to the indifferent element of economic, linguistic, juridical, “political,” psychoanalytic generalities, etc.

Thesis 5: This powerlessness to determine the political meaning of power, or this denegation of a dis-sidence (*Spaltung*) that affects “the” power [« *le* » *pouvoir*] and prohibits one from speaking about it in general, are politically “well-founded” or enjoy their own positivity.

Whether it expressly poses its problem or not, every theory, politics, and political theory to this day is already installed within the being-political of power, assuming it known and thought. Or, but it's the same thing, given in gregarious or molar, always non-political generalities: generalities of economic production (Class Struggle), generalities of will (the Prince, the Subject), historical generalities (the People, the Nation), “political” generalities in the traditional sense (the State, the Struggle of consciousnesses for recognition, the friend-enemy relation), legal generalities (the Contract, the Law, “Civil Society,” the Person, the General Will), and linguistic and logico-symbolic generalities (the Signifier and the intersubjectivity that it grounds).

Each time, a background generality that is in itself indifferent to the Relations of Power is supposed to give them their essence or, it's not quite the contrary, derive them as an ensemble of properties and effects assignable to more profound historical instances and causes. Each time, a substance, a soil, a terrain, a foundation, an instance will have broken from real power a certain number of identifiable, global or specific effects, isolated them into objects of an *onto-theo-politics*, to reduce them to “Politics” [« *la politique* »] thus determined abstractly. Each time, we have broken the subject off from its determinations of immediate powers, depriving them of a primary political benefit and transforming them into these fetishes: the Prince, the Despot, the Will, the People, the State, the Bourgeois and the Proletariat, the Master and the Rebel. Each time, we will have *depoliticized* power to better blunt the point of Resistance, indeed Dis-sidence: un? power [*im?pouvoir*], that is, that which precisely divides power in general with itself and dooms it

to the fractional process of multiplicities.

This is the guiding thread of a revolutionary critique of politics and its theories. Before, for example, struggling against any power *in general*, we must still be sure to grasp the political meaning or being of power, to not depoliticize it surreptitiously into the statistical generality of a contradiction of classes, a universal “Mastery” or “State,” a “State Apparatus,” or a “Will” of the Prince. Nothing is fiercer in ignoring the meaning and essence of power, or, said otherwise, in not posing the problem of its historicity of the flow, its production or its genealogy, in leading the old political fetishism to a Platonizing mode, than certain current denunciations of power in general, which to better savor the delights of real defeat and the sublimated Revolution, rearing it first into a fetish on the basis, for example, of the signifier considered in general, as everyone begins to know it. Are these denunciations more advanced than Marxism which draws the meaning of power from within the generality of a contradiction of classes, the meaning of classes from within the generality of the “Relations of Production,” and the meaning of these Relations from within the conditions of an economic-type external production? From a molar political generality (classes) into economic exteriority, it is the internal cause of power that one lacks or denies, as it is, from the ideality of the master-signifier into the ideality of Revolution, its specific materiality that one does not want to know. In both cases, it is the meaning of it that one assumes known by making it pass under known, all-too-known, forms of meaning...

2) All, everywhere, always...Yet there is no “everything”: this is precisely the complex meaning of power that will teach us that power, even as a Body, never forms of a totality, that this would otherwise be to confound its meaning or its essence, un?power, with its dominant forms. This is why we say: *everything is political, except that there is no “everything,” there is an affirmative division of power with a multiplicity effect*. Power in general is not a thought: it is a bestial representation, hardly a representation, an image fabricated by hatred and deception, and a base invention. There are, therefore, “exceptions” to the very general paralogism that in particular grounds the two currently dominant discourses of power, the Marxist and the Freudian: *a)* every philosophy subordinates power to a-political generalities, except the “hermeneutic” of power in the Nietzschean way that subordinates dominant “Power” to the meaning of power, that is, to its productive and fractional essence. Nietzsche is the Luther of politics: politics and its destruction constitute his own invention. Another exception, but in a lesser extent, is what we will call an “archaeology of power”[1] that recognizes the im-mediacy of the relations of the association of power to bodies; *b)* every philosophy forgets to pose the problem of the production of power, “archaeology” included. Even Marxism, for Marx did not deserve to pose this problem except under a general-technical concept of production which is already specularly contaminated by the concept of reproduction. It is precisely because Marx elaborates the concept of production on the economic model that he only recognizes it under its “technical,” external and dominant regime. By contrast, that production would be *par excellence* within its materiality the production of objects, agents, machines, and the multiple subjects of power is enough to disengage production from its specular Marxist model, from its old dogmatic and violent blends with reproduction, and the multiplicities of power from their blends with coded and transcendent forms (the State, Classes, the Family, etc.).

Everything fits, all these lines of demarcation converge in a minoritarian practice (i.e., positively fractional and as little reproductive as possible) of thought and its “power,” and determines a virtual focal point, a sort of Beyond of politics, that is, dominant politics: this is as much the distinction of a “pure,” non-Marxist and non-economic concept of production as it is the distinction of a “pure” non-onto-theo-political (i.e., global or specific) concept of power.

The essence of power – production (= production + division) of power – are multiplicities that are neither macro-, nor micro-political, but trans-political or “fractional.”

What does “fractional” mean? This concept is the solution to the question Nietzsche posed: how does one contrary emerge from its contrary? How does one form a continuous becoming, a production that would not be a disguised reproduction? How does one think *transition* or *passage* in-themselves and no longer under a rule of external synthesis?

Two contraries are fractional and *pass* from one to the other (syntax of being-towards...) without mediation of a generality stopping the transition when – far from forming numerically distinct entities – they associate themselves through the simple *contiguity of a duplicity*, i.e., a uni-lateral identification and uni-lateral difference: 1-contrary is identified with the other which is distinguished from the contrary (a contradiction without mediation).

This is the equation that is here simply posed to which we reduce “every” thought, politics, and political thought, to deconstruct and transform it. This equation contains the unknown = X, the object that is somewhat fleeing from our hunt, but that it is always possible to determine. Of course this is *the Beyond of the Power Principle*, a principle that we will schematize through some theses that will formulate it from this Beyond. As towards this Beyond, because we are not inerudite, nothing prohibits us from writing it (even if it means putting its determination off until later): *the objet (r)* = the “little” (r) as “resistance” and “revolution,” as minoritarian power, as anti-power, as un-power.[2] Even though this reference is not enough to exhaust the political meaning of it, this small (r) designates not power in general, but its essence insofar as it subtracts it from any dominant generality and from the “repression” of which all the thinkers of Power and politics are consequently interested in.

3) This dispositive (r) remains to be constructed, but it already functions, without which we have to add it to the political and theoretical apparatuses of a “bourgeois” or “Marxist” regime. Its construction consists in rendering “visible” its functioning *at the same time* as the type of power that it destroys or leads to its downfall [*déclin*], that is, the “thought” insofar as it is always more or less a political vision of the world. The oldest soil, the most constant soil of the West is this confusion of the dis-sident and resistant essence of power with its dominant forms that are found to almost always be its effective forms, is what perhaps is appropriate to question. The point is to shake along a chain that makes a circle – but what circle is precisely the question – this background and founding paralogism of all the “foundations,” of all the despotic and controlling erections, of all institutions and contractualizations, and where everything must simultaneously lead to: the critique of power, the critique of the political meaning of power, the critique of the power of meaning, the critique of thought as the politics and technology of

meaning, and therefore as a hermeneutic – all these lines converge and diverge in a so barely totalitarian focal point that it rather functions like a resisting and disseminating apparatus.

Hence, the necessity to raise a critique that ensues from a production of power and meaning and does not precede it, one that does not reconstitute itself into a foundation, a guarantee, a soil, a logos of power, one that rather confounds itself with a genuine *minoritarian enunciation*. It is to all the a-political generalities that neutralize and indifferenciate the Relations of Force that we must “substitute” a wholly other “generality,” a minor or minoritarian one that resists determining, but one that would be to the restrained or specific political species that are onto-theo-political thoughts like a “general economy” of the Relations of Power. This is a universal or a meaning of power that would no longer in turn belong to mastery, to power in the dominant sense, one that can no longer be disguised in a neutral substance or a statistical and a-political whole, i.e., too “political”: the logos of depths (foundation) or the logos of the heights (phallus). Despite its immediacy, “Power” rather derives from an un?power, an anti?power, a non?being of power in a dis-sident regime, but this unpower does not reconstitute an instance that is superior and sublimating to politics. It assumes an essence of power that is first active or productive (i.e., material) before being reproductive, nothing less than an ascetic ideal of the Revolution.

In the same way that the meaning of Being has always been forgotten by being, likewise – and because: it concerns the same Cause – the meaning of power has always been coated (it is so more and more, the conjuncture confirms it) by power itself in the *brutalitas* of its limitless, imperialist and fascistic deployment. However, the meaning of power must not reconstitute a hinter-world of the Revolution. This is why we hold two unique-and-split theses together that form the antinomy of the Power Principle and its Beyond: that is, *meaning* as the relation of the Power Principle to its Beyond or its dis-sident and disseminating “cause”:

Thesis 6: The essence of power is not “political” in the wise and vulgar senses of this word. The essence of power is anti?political, un?political, super?political: this is the thesis that we must oppose to the tautologies of onto-theo-politics. The essence of power is distinguished from power or *différenciates* [*différencie*] qua fractional.

Thesis 7: The essence of power is “political,” assuming the un?power within power that still belongs to power consequently: this is the too apparent “tautology” that we must oppose to its conditionings in exteriority (by the economy, the signifier, and practice). The essence of power does not form a hinter-world (like an intelligible phallus or an un-intelligible Angel above the phallus). As this is what distinguishes it from the “class struggle,” it fails to interpret and politically evaluate an apparent tautology: power is that which empowers...power powers...[*le pouvoir est ce qui peut...le pouvoir pouvant...*] (as we say: “thought thinks” or “speech speaks,” *die Sprache spricht*). However, this tautology hides the cleaving of a specifically minoritarian enunciation.

Thesis 8: There is a minoritarian enunciation when the overdetermination of un?power by power is subordinated to their affirmative continuous division.

[1] Michel Foucault's works since *Discipline and Punish*.

[2] To designate the political moment of the *objet (r)*, the term un-power (“un-power” to mitigate negativity or subordinating it to production) is less correct; the term “anti?power” is ripe for confusion; and the term “counter-power” falsifies the *objet (r)*.

translated by Jeremy R. Smith

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